

Plains Apache language

The **Plains Apache** language (or **Kiowa Apache** language) is a **Southern Athabaskan language** formerly spoken by the **Plains Apache**, organized as the **Apache Tribe of Oklahoma**, living primarily around **Anadarko** in southwest **Oklahoma**.^[2] The language is **extinct** as of 2008, when Alfred Chalepah, Jr., the last native speaker, died.^[3]

Plains Apache is the most divergent member of the Southern Athabaskan languages, a family which also includes **Navajo**, **Chiricahua Apache**, **Mescalero Apache**, **Lipan Apache**, **Western Apache**, and **Jicarilla Apache**. As a member of the broader Athabaskan family, it has an extremely complex system of verbal morphology, often enabling entire sentences to be constructed with only a verb.

Contents

Phonology

Consonants

Vowels

Syllable Structure

Tone

Morphology

Nouns

Verbs

Syntax

See also

Notes

References

Phonology

This article follows the orthography of Bittle (1963); where this differs from the **IPA**, IPA is given between slashes.

Consonants

Plains Apache has a large consonant inventory resembling that of its close relatives Navajo and Western Apache.

		Bilabial	Alveolar			Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
			plain	lateral	fricated				
Stop	<u>unaspirated</u>	b /p/	d /t/	dl /tɬ/	dz /ts/	dž /tʃ/		g /k/	
	<u>aspirated</u>			tɬ /tɬʰ/	ts /tsʰ/	tš /tʃʰ/		k /kʰ/	
	<u>glottalized</u>		t'	t' /tɬ'/	ts'	tš' /tʃ'/		k'	?
Continuant	<u>voiceless</u>			t /t/	s	š /ʃ/		x	h
	<u>voiced</u>			l	z	ž /ʒ/		ɣ	
Nasal	<u>stop</u>		n̪d						
	<u>continuant</u>	m	n						
Glide						y /j/			

The phoneme /n̪d/ is only found in prefixes and does not occur before /o/. /h/ is in free variation with /x/ preceding /a/ and also does not occur before /o/. The fricated alveolar and postalveolar series are tend to be realized as slightly retroflex preceding /i/ and /e/, though these variants are in free variation with the unretralized realizations. The plain alveolar and velar series are slightly fronted preceding /i/ and /e/, and slightly backed and rounded preceding /o/.

Vowels

Plains Apache distinguishes four vowel qualities, much like the other Southern Athabaskan languages.

Plains Apache	
	Kiowa Apache
Native to	United States
Region	Caddo County, Oklahoma
Ethnicity	Plains Apache
Extinct	2008
Language family	Dené–Yeniseian? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Na-Dene ▪ Athabaskan ▪ Southern Athabaskan ▪ Plains Apache
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	apk
Glottolog	kiow1264 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/kiow1264) ^[1]

Historical distribution of Southern Athabaskan languages. Plains Apache (labeled Kiowa Apache) is located in northwestern Oklahoma.

	Front	Back
High	i	
Mid	e /ɛ/	o
Low	a	

Additionally, all vowels may be either short or long and nasal or oral. Length is indicated in the orthography by writing the vowel twice (e.g. *kóó*, "water"); nasalization is indicated with an *ogonek* (e.g. *nòò*, "earth"). When long, the realization of /i/ tends to be closer to [i], and when short, closer to [ɪ]. An analogous alternation is true of /o/ [u~o], although this variation is more free, and is lexicalized by some speakers in certain words.

Syllable Structure

The Plains Apache syllable is maximally CCV:C, e.g. *stlèèh* "pants", though initial clusters are rare and must co-occur with a long vowel, making most syllables (C)V(:)(C), e.g. *xòòs* "cactus" and *séé* "dust". All consonants may appear in the syllable onset, although /l/ and a null onset are not permitted word-initially; only /d, g, ?, s, z, ?, ɬ, h, l/ and /ɬ/ may appear in the syllable coda, whether word-final or not.

Tone

Plains Apache has a register tone system with two levels, low and high. Low is written with a grave accent (e.g. *bìs*, "bank"), and high is written with an acute accent (e.g. *šéé*, "kindness"). Syllables with short vowels bear a single toneme, but those with long vowels have one toneme for each mora of the vowel, making for a total of four contours:

- high-high, *t'qóóš*, "bark"
- high-low, *béè-lqáq?*, "point"
- low-high, *gòó?*, "snake"
- low-low, *gààd*, "spread of cedars"

Morphology

Nouns

Almost every noun in Plains Apache can optionally take a pronominal prefix to indicate its possessor. These prefixes are as follows (some of the prefixes have multiple forms in free variation; in these cases, the more common variant is listed first).

	First person	Second person	Third person	Third person indefinite	Fourth person
Singular	ší-	dí-	bí-	?	góó-
Plural	dàxí- ~ dá-		~ mí-	?	~ gó-

Some of these forms require further explanation. The indefinite third person may be used when the possessor is unknown, and is similar in meaning to "someone's" (e.g. *ʔí-bqáq* "a hoop owned by some unknown person"). The fourth person is reserved for possessors who are deemed to be in some way remote from the speaker, usually socially; compare *bí-bqáq*, which would refer to a hoop belonging to someone who the speaker is familiar with and interacts with frequently and informally, and *góó-bqáq*, used for someone who the speaker has a purely formal relationship with and does not know well.

The noun bases to which these prefixes can be added are of one of three classes: primary, compound, and nominalized. Primary noun bases are mostly monosyllabic stems such as *t'èèš* "charcoal," though a few of them seem to consist of an unidentified prefix and a stem (e.g. *dèè-éh* "antelope"), and some others are simply unanalyzable polysyllables, perhaps originally onomatopoeic (e.g. *ʔqáqʔqáq* "magpie"). Many of the stem nouns have different forms depending on their morphological context, with an absolute form when unpossessed, an inflected form when possessed, and a combining form in compounds or nominalized phrases. The formation of these is generally irregular, although certain patterns do exist, such as initial *x, s, and t* becoming *y, z, and l* when inflected (e.g. *sàà* > *bí-zàà* "his language") and a final *V:h* becoming *V?* (e.g. *t'ààh* > *bí-t'á?* "his feather").

Some stem nouns, especially those referring to body parts, are inalienably possessed, i.e. they cannot occur without a possessor prefix (e.g. *bí-dààh* "his lips," but not **dààh*). In these cases the indefinite prefix must be used if one wishes to talk about the object without specifying the possessor (*ʔí-dààh* "lips"). In order to indicate alienable possession of these nouns, an additional possessor prefix can be attached before the indefinite prefix, yielding forms like *bí-ʔí-k'á?* "his fat (which comes from the body of something or someone else, but is now in his possession)" contrasting with *bí-k'á?* "his fat (which is a part of his own body)." Some of these nouns may change their meaning when preceded by *ʔí-*, such as *ʔí-bé?* "milk" versus *bí-bé?* "her breast". Lastly, some can only take the indefinite prefix, effectively turning them into regular alienably possessed nouns starting with *ʔí-* (e.g. *ʔí-dààh* "enemy," but *bí-ʔí-dààh* "his enemy," not **bí-dààh*).

The second kind of noun bases are compounds, which are formed from two noun stems and sometimes an enclitic of obscure meaning (e.g. *bí-déé-kòò* "his tears," from *déé*, combining form of "eye," and *kòò*, combining form of "water"). The third kind of noun bases are nominalized verbs or phrases, which may or may not include some kind of a relative enclitic. Examples include *dáł-ts'ààh* "zebra, tiger," from the identical verb meaning

"marks are on it," and *hà-ts'í-γàq̂s-é* "badger," from the verb *hà-ts'í-γàq̂s* "he scratches out" plus the relative enclitic *-é* "he who."

Verbs

Like those of most other Athabaskan languages, Plains Apache verbs are highly morphologically complex, exhibiting polypersonal agreement, rich aspect marking, and the characteristic Athabaskan classifier system (a set of four mandatory valence-changing prefixes found throughout the family). Bittle (1963) identifies 14 positions in the verb template, divided into the verbal base (which defines the lexical meaning of the verb) and paradigmatic prefixes (which inflect the verb for person, number, tense, aspect, mood, and voice). The following verb template table is reproduced from Bittle:

Position	Verbal base		Paradigmatic prefixes
	Theme	Adverbial prefixes	
1			Indirect object
2		Postposition	
3		Adverbial prefixes	
4	Theme prefix		
5			Iterative mode
6			Number prefix
7			Direct object
8			Deictic prefixes
9		Adverbial prefixes	
10			Tense prefix
11			Modal prefixes
12			Subject pronoun
13			Classifier
14	Stem		

However, a verb in Plains Apache never has an affix in each position. A typical verb might be inflected as follows:

Šàyédiʔàq̂
 ši-a-yi-dí-Ø - Ø - ?àq̂
 1SG.OBJ-PP-3OBJ-PFV-3SBJ-CLF-give
 'He gives it to me'

In this case, *ši-* is the indirect object prefix in slot 1, *-a-* is the postposition in slot 2, *-yi-* is the direct object prefix in slot 7, *-dí-* is the modal prefix in slot 11, slots 12 and 13 are occupied by zero morphemes, and *ʔàq̂* is the stem in slot 14. All other slots are empty.

The above example displays the zero classifier. Following is an example of a fully inflected verb with the *-l-* classifier prefix:

Šìgòlbèèš
 ši-go-Ø - Ø -l-bèèš
 1SG.OBJ-NUM-IPFV-3SBJ-CLF-boil
 'They two are boiling me'

Syntax

Like other Southern Athabaskan languages, Plains Apache has strongly head-final tendencies, with a predominant word order of subject-object-verb and postpositions rather than prepositions. This is illustrated in the following example sentences:

Dèènáá	kóó	ʔílbééš
dèènáá	kóó	ʔí-l-bééš
man	water	INDEF-CLF-boil
'The man boils water'		

Séé	míidžóʔdá?	dàyiγíníl
séé	mi-džóʔ-dá?	dà-yi-γí-ø-ø-níl
dirt	3SG-back-PP	ADV-3OBJ-PROG-3SUBJ-CLF-throw
'He threw dirt on his back'		

However, due to the morphological complexity of Plains Apache verb inflection, it is often possible for a sentence to consist of a single verb, e.g.

Dàdijimàq̂s
 da-di-Ø -lìd-Ø -màq̂s
 NUM-THM-IPFV-1DUPL.SBJ-CLF-go.to.war
 'Each one of us is starting off to war'

Noun phrases always contain only a noun, as Plains Apache has no determiners or adjectives; the equivalent of adjectival modification is achieved by the use of compound and nominalized nouns discussed above.

See also

- [Apache](#)
- [Southern Athabaskan languages](#)
- [Kiowa](#)

Notes

1. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Kiowa Apache" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/kiow1264>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
2. Everett, Dianna. ["Apache Tribe of Oklahoma"](https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=AP002) (<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=AP002>). *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. Oklahoma Historical Society. Retrieved 20 January 2020.
3. Morgan, J. L. (2012). *Classificatory Verbs in Plains Apache* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma).

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